

AMERICAN ISLAM

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A Story of Shared Destiny at 250

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THE EAST–WEST FOUNDATION



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Foreword

A nation's anniversaries are invitations to remember. As the United States marks two hundred and fifty years since its Declaration of Independence, it does so as the most religiously diverse society in human history — and at a moment when the bonds that hold diverse citizens together feel newly strained. This small book is offered in that spirit of remembrance, and of repair.

Its argument is simple, and the evidence for it is older than the Republic: Muslims have not arrived late to the American story; they have been present at its every chapter. A Moroccan sultan was the first sovereign to recognize the new nation. Enslaved African scholars who prayed in Arabic helped build the southern economies and seeded the music that became the blues. A Muslim boxer's refusal of conscience widened the religious liberty that now shelters every American. Immigrant chemists, nurtured in American laboratories, photographed the breaking of chemical bonds and repaired the machinery of the living cell. To recount these things is not to plead for acceptance. It is to describe a co-authorship already accomplished.

Running beneath that history is an older memory still. Fourteen centuries ago, in the oasis town of Medina, the Prophet Muhammad bound a community of Muslims, pagan Arab clans, and Jewish tribes into a single body politic by a written compact — the *Šahīfa* — that let each keep its own faith while sharing the work of defense and justice. That covenant rhymes, across the centuries, with the Mayflower Compact, with the disestablishment clause of the First Amendment, and with the motto a later republic would stamp upon its seal: *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one. The Qur'an grounds the same disposition in creation itself, teaching that human

difference exists so that we may come to know one another, and that justice is owed even to those we do not love.

The chapters that follow trace the long thread of Muslim life in America. The documentary reader that closes the volume gathers the texts — founding treaties, scripture, the Medinan covenant, and the voices of American Muslims across four centuries — from which that story is woven, each followed by questions for reflection. They are meant for the seminar table and the dinner table alike, for the classroom, the congregation, and the quiet hour.

The East–West Foundation offers this volume as part of its work marking the nation’s semiquincentennial: a record of what has been built together, and an argument that the resources for mending a fractured republic are closer to hand, and older, than we tend to assume. The future, we believe, belongs to those who can hold difference together without dissolving it — to the bridge-builders. America has been making them all along.

Iqbal Akhtar

Executive Director, The East–West Foundation

Miami, 2026

A Note on the Texts and Translations

Renderings of the Qur'an in this volume are the editor's own. They aim for clarity and fidelity to the Arabic rather than for liturgical authority, and they are offered for study; readers seeking an authoritative translation are encouraged to consult the standard scholarly editions. The Arabic is given in the 'Uthmānic orthography and set in the Amiri typeface.

The text of the Compact of Medina (Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna) is rendered by the editor from the recension preserved in the Sira of Ibn Ishāq, in the transmission of Ibn Hishām. Clause numbering follows the conventional divisions adopted by modern scholars; the rendering is a paraphrase intended to convey sense and structure, not a word-for-word translation.

Treaty texts — the Moroccan–American Treaty of Friendship and the Treaty of Tripoli — are in the public domain and are reproduced or summarized from the official United States record. Where modern works remain under copyright — among them the published translations of Omar ibn Said's autobiography and the words of twentieth-century figures such as Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali — those sources are described and cited rather than quoted at length, and the reader is directed to them in the bibliography.

Transliteration of Arabic follows a simplified version of the system of the International Journal of Middle East Studies, retaining the diacritical marks for emphatic and long consonants and the signs for 'ayn (‘) and hamza (’). Dates are given according to the Common Era, with the corresponding year of the Islamic hijrī calendar (AH) supplied where it clarifies the historical setting. Diacritics on proper names that have entered common English usage — Qur'an, Medina, Muhammad — are generally omitted.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

American Muslims have been woven into the fabric of the United States since before its founding — from the first treaty of friendship with Morocco in 1786 to the Nobel Prize-winning laboratories of Caltech and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology today. This study documents that continuous thread: the enslaved African Muslim scholars who helped build the southern economy, the Islamic musical traditions that gave birth to the blues, the Supreme Court case that expanded religious freedom for all Americans, and the contemporary contributions of a vibrant community. Far from a story of recent arrival, the Muslim American experience is an integral chapter in the American story itself.

What follows traces that thread across the nation's history and into its present — from the founding treaties and the faith of the enslaved to the laboratories, courtrooms, and civic institutions of today — and closes with a documentary reader of primary texts, each paired with questions, offered for reflection on the nation's two hundred and fiftieth year.

CHAPTER 1

Present at the Creation

Muslims and the Founding of America

The Muslim presence in North America predates the Republic by more than two centuries. In 1527, Muṣṭafā Zemmouri — a Moroccan-born man enslaved by the Spanish and remembered by history as Estevanico — landed with the ill-fated Narváez expedition on the coast of Florida. Surviving shipwreck and an eight-year overland odyssey across the present-day American South and Southwest, he became one of the first known Africans, and almost certainly the first Muslim, to traverse the interior of what would become the United States. The thread that begins with him runs unbroken to the present day.

On December 20, 1777, Moroccan Sultan Mohammed III issued a decree opening Moroccan ports to American ships and guaranteeing safe passage — making Morocco the first sovereign nation to publicly recognize the independence of the United States. This act of friendship between a Muslim ruler and a fledgling republic culminated in the Moroccan–American Treaty of Friendship, sealed by the Sultan on June 23, 1786, and signed by Thomas Jefferson in Paris on January 1, 1787, and by John Adams in London on January 25, 1787. The United States Congress ratified the treaty on July 18, 1787 — the same summer the Constitutional Convention was meeting in Philadelphia.

The treaty was negotiated by Thomas Barclay, whom Adams endorsed as a man of steadiness and prudence. Remarkably, Barclay secured a treaty of friendship without a promise of tribute — a rarity among Barbary Coast

agreements. The twenty-five-article compact covered diplomatic relations, trade on a most-favoured-nation basis, and protections for shipping. Renewed in 1836 “as originally written,” the Moroccan–American Treaty of Friendship remains the longest unbroken treaty relationship in United States history, now spanning nearly 240 years.

Military muster rolls from the Continental Army contain names suggesting an Islamic presence among America’s first patriots. Bampett Muhammad served in the Virginia Line between 1775 and 1783. Yusuf Ben Ali (Joseph Benhaley), a man of North African Arab descent, served as an aide to General Thomas Sumter in South Carolina and later settled as a free person under the South Carolina Sundry Act of 1790 — the best-documented case of a Muslim Revolutionary War soldier. Peter Salem and Salem Poor, both heroes of the Battle of Bunker Hill, bear etymological echoes of the Arabic word *salām* (peace), according to the historian Amir Muhammad, who has systematically documented these Muslim soldiers through muster-roll analysis.

Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro, c. 1736–1823), while not a soldier, embodies the founding-era Muslim presence: born in West Africa and enslaved in Maryland, he earned his freedom, became an entrepreneur and bank investor in Georgetown, and maintained his Islamic faith throughout his life. His portrait, painted by Charles Willson Peale in 1819, hangs as quiet testimony to Muslim life in early America.

Among the estimated 400,000 Africans brought to American shores, a significant proportion — roughly 24 percent from the Senegambia region — came from deeply Islamized societies. Many were literate, educated, and accomplished. Their stories challenge the narrative that enslaved people arrived as blank slates.

Omar ibn Said (c. 1770–1863), a Fula scholar from present-day Senegal who had studied mathematics, astronomy, and theology for twenty-five years, was captured in 1807 and enslaved in North Carolina. In 1831 he wrote

a sixteen-page autobiography in Arabic — the only known surviving Arabic-language autobiography by an enslaved person in America. The manuscript, acquired by the Library of Congress in 2017, begins with *Sūrat al-Mulk* from the Qur'an, which declares that sovereignty belongs to God alone — a subtle theological protest against the institution of slavery.

Bilali Muhammad (c. 1770–1857), from Timbo in Guinea, became head driver of more than four hundred enslaved people on Thomas Spalding's Sapelo Island plantation in Georgia. A master cultivator of rice, Bilali maintained Islamic practice throughout his life — performing the five daily prayers, observing Ramaḍān, and wearing a fez and kaftan. During the War of 1812, when British attack seemed imminent, Spalding armed eighty enslaved men under Bilali's command. He authored the Bilali Document, a thirteen-page Arabic manuscript on Mālikī jurisprudence, preserved at the University of Georgia's Hargrett Library — described by Muhammed Abdullah al-Ahari as the only extant work on Islamic law written during the time of slavery in North America.

Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (c. 1701–1773), from a prominent Fulbe clerical family in present-day Senegal, had memorized the entire Qur'an before his capture in 1730. Enslaved in Maryland, he was eventually brought to England, where he reportedly wrote three complete copies of the Qur'an from memory. His portrait by William Hoare of Bath (1733) is the first known portrait of a freed enslaved person in British art.

Abdulrahman Ibrahim ibn Sori (c. 1762–1829), son of the ruler of Fouta Djallon, was an educated military commander who spoke five languages and could read and write Arabic. Enslaved for forty years in Natchez, Mississippi, his knowledge of cotton cultivation made his enslaver one of the region's leading producers. His story, told in Terry Alford's *Prince Among Slaves*, culminated in intervention by the Sultan of Morocco, President John Quincy Adams, and Secretary of State Henry Clay to secure his freedom.

These Muslims' contributions extended beyond individual stories. Enslaved Africans from the Senegambia brought specialized knowledge of rice cultivation — a skill that dates back two to three thousand years along the Niger and Casamance Rivers — making South Carolina's rice economy possible and the colony one of the wealthiest of the thirteen. The Gullah Geechee culture of the Georgia–Carolina Sea Islands preserves Islamic survivals to this day, including rice cakes called *saraka* (from the Arabic *ṣadaqa*, “charity”) and the ring-shout tradition, which scholars trace to the circumambulation of the Kaʿba (ṭawāf).

How many of the enslaved were Muslim cannot be known with precision, but the historian Sylviane Diouf and others estimate that tens of thousands — very possibly far more — of the Africans carried to North America came from the Islamized societies of the Senegambia, the western Sudan, and the Guinea coast. Some, like Salih Bilali of St. Simons Island, were remembered by their enslavers as devout to the end; others left their faith legible only in a name, a prayer overheard, a refusal of pork, or a child taught to face the east. That so much survives at all — manuscripts, portraits, recorded testimony — is a measure of how deeply the faith was held against every pressure to abandon it.

A few of these lives are known in remarkable detail. Ayuba Suleiman Diallo — “Job ben Solomon” — a Fulbe merchant enslaved in Maryland in 1731, wrote out the Qurʾan from memory and was eventually freed and returned to Senegambia. Abdul-Rahman Ibrahima ibn Sori, a prince of Futa Jallon held forty years in Mississippi, won his release in 1828 only after his case reached the Sultan of Morocco and the desk of the Secretary of State. Yarrow Mamout, freed in the District of Columbia, became a property owner and depositor in one of the new republic's first banks, and sat in old age for a portrait by Charles Willson Peale. Theirs were not isolated curiosities but the visible peaks of a far larger submerged history.

CHAPTER 2

What Islam Gave the Blues

West African Musical Roots of America's Quintessential Art Form

Jazz and the blues — America's most distinctive artistic contributions to world culture — trace a direct lineage to the Islamic musical traditions of West Africa's Sahel. This connection, first proposed by Paul Oliver in *Savannah Syncopators* (1970), has been elaborated by a generation of scholars including Robert Palmer, Alan Lomax, Gerhard Kubik, and Sylviane Diouf.

The evidence is compelling. Genetic research confirms a prevalence of Fulani and Wolof ancestry in enslaved populations, especially in the southern coastal states and Mississippi. The United States received the highest proportion of enslaved people from Islamized regions of any American destination — a demographic fact that may help explain why the blues emerged in the American South rather than in Cuba or Brazil. As Kubik observed, the vocal style of many blues singers — with its melisma, wavy intonation, and ornament — is a heritage of the large region of West Africa that had been in contact with the Islamic world by way of the Maghrib since the seventh and eighth centuries.

West African griots (also called *jali* or *jeli*), the hereditary musicians, storytellers, and oral historians of the Mande tradition, have practised their art since the thirteenth-century Mali Empire. Many griots were and are members of Sufi brotherhoods. Their performance style — solo, declamatory singing with melisma, tremolo, and wavy inflection over string accompaniment — bears a striking resemblance to early Delta blues.

The instruments tell the story most vividly. The kora (a twenty-one-string harp-lute), the ngoni (also called xalam or hoddu), and the akonting of the Jola people are direct ancestors of the American banjo. Thomas Jefferson himself noted in 1782 that the instrument proper to enslaved Africans was the “Banjer, which they brought hither from Africa.” Laurent Dubois’s *The Banjo* documents this lineage, and Kubik notes a crucial cultural marker: string instruments were traditionally favoured in Muslim West African communities, while drumming was more characteristic of non-Muslim West Africans.

A historical accident amplified this Islamic musical inheritance. After the Stono Rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina — led by enslaved people who marched with drums beating — colonial authorities banned drums, horns, and loud instruments. This prohibition effectively eliminated coastal drum-based traditions while leaving Sahelian Muslim musicians, who relied on strings and solo singing, free to continue their practice. The pentatonic scales, blue notes, and pitch instability characteristic of the blues can be traced to the musical systems of the Islamic West African savannah belt.

Perhaps the most striking connection is between the Islamic adhān (call to prayer) and the American field holler — the precursor of the blues. Diouf demonstrates that Alan Lomax’s 1947 recording of “Levee Camp Holler” by Bama at Parchman prison closely matches the call to prayer of a West African muezzin, sharing the same ornamented notes, elongated sounds, pauses, nasal humming, and melismatic structure. Qur’anic recitation (tilāwa) features strong trembling sounds, elongated notes, long pauses, glissandos, and nasality — all hallmarks of early blues vocal style.

These traditions converged at Congo Square in the Tremé neighbourhood of New Orleans, where from the early 1800s until mid-century hundreds of enslaved and free people of African descent gathered on Sunday afternoons, sowing the seeds that would grow into jazz, the

second line, and the extraordinary musical tradition that defines American culture worldwide.

The kinship of these traditions has not been lost on later musicians. The Malian guitarist Ali Farka Touré, whose playing the world came to call the African root of the blues, insisted that the influence ran the other way — that what Americans heard as wholly their own was, to his ear, the music of the Niger bend come home. Ethnomusicologists have traced the same continuities in the one-string diddley bow, in the bent “blue” notes that slip between the keys of the European scale, and in the call-and-response and melisma that shape both a Delta field holler and a muezzin’s call to prayer.

CHAPTER 3

Muhammad Ali and the Expansion of American Religious Freedom

“War is against the teachings of the Holy Qur’an”

When Muhammad Ali refused induction into the United States Armed Forces on April 28, 1967, in Houston, Texas, he set in motion a legal and cultural drama that would reshape American religious freedom. Born Cassius Clay, Ali had publicly joined the Nation of Islam in February 1964 and received his new name from Elijah Muhammad in March of that year. Reclassified 1-A in February 1966 after draft standards were lowered, Ali filed for conscientious-objector status, declaring that war was against the teachings of the Holy Qur’an and that he was not trying to dodge the draft.

The consequences were immediate and devastating. The same day Ali refused to step forward, the New York State Athletic Commission suspended his boxing licence and the World Boxing Association stripped his heavyweight title. He was indicted, tried before an all-white jury that deliberated just twenty-one minutes, and sentenced to the maximum penalty: five years in prison and a ten-thousand-dollar fine. Banned from boxing for roughly three and a half years during what many considered his athletic prime, Ali lost millions in potential earnings. As Martin Luther King Jr. observed, Ali was giving up fame and fortune to do what his conscience told him was right.

The case that reached the Supreme Court — *Clay v. United States*, 403 U.S. 698 (1971) — turned on the three-part test for conscientious-objector

status established in *United States v. Seeger* (1965): opposition to war in any form, a basis in religious training and belief, and sincerity. A retired Kentucky judge serving as hearing officer had found Ali sincere and recommended granting his claim. The Department of Justice overrode this recommendation, advising the Appeal Board to deny the claim on all three grounds and characterizing Ali's beliefs as political and racial rather than religious. The Appeal Board denied the claim without stating its reasons.

The behind-the-scenes deliberations, documented by Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong, reveal an extraordinary drama. Justice Thurgood Marshall recused himself. The initial conference vote was five to three to affirm the conviction, and Chief Justice Burger assigned Justice John Marshall Harlan II to write the majority opinion. But Harlan's law clerk, Thomas Krattenmaker, was troubled; he read Elijah Muhammad's *Message to the Blackman in America* and persuaded Harlan to do the same. Harlan concluded that the Justice Department had misrepresented Ali's beliefs — the "holy war" Ali conceded he might fight was entirely abstract, analogous to the Jehovah's Witness theocratic wars the Court had already found insufficient to disqualify a registrant in *Sicurella v. United States* (1955). Harlan switched his vote, creating a four-to-four tie that would have affirmed the conviction without opinion.

Justice Potter Stewart then proposed a narrow compromise. Because the government now conceded that two of its three grounds were invalid, yet the Appeal Board had given no reasons, it was impossible to determine on which ground the Board had relied. The conviction was reversed eight to nothing on June 28, 1971. The government's own concession — that Ali's beliefs were founded on basic tenets of the Muslim religion and fell unquestionably within the religious-training-and-belief clause — formally established that Islam constitutes a legitimate religious basis for conscientious objection under federal law. The *per curiam* opinion declared the Justice Department "simply wrong as a matter of law." Justice

Douglas's concurrence went further, holding that such belief is a matter of conscience protected by the First Amendment, which Congress has no power to qualify or dilute.

While the decision rested on procedural rather than directly constitutional grounds, its practical effect was profound. *Clay v. United States* extended the *Seeger–Welsh* framework to Islamic belief, establishing that Muslim objections to war could qualify on equal terms with Quaker, Mennonite, and Jehovah's Witness objections. As the legal scholar Samuel Regalado has observed, Ali confronted the United States government in a case that involved neither race nor athletics — and won.

The decision itself, handed down in 1971, rested on narrow ground. A unanimous Court — Justice Marshall having recused himself — found that the government had failed to specify which of the legal requirements for conscientious objection Ali's claim was supposed to have failed, and that his objection to war was demonstrably grounded in sincere religious belief. The Justices avoided the larger constitutional question. But the practical effect was sweeping: the ruling strengthened the hand of every American whose refusal to bear arms arose from faith, and it did so on behalf of a Black Muslim whom much of the country had been taught to fear. The protections of the First Amendment, the case affirmed once more, are widened at the margins, by those obliged to fight for them.

CHAPTER 4

Three Nobel Prizes in Chemistry

American Muslims at the Frontier of Science

American Muslims have made foundational contributions to science at the highest level. Three Americans of Muslim heritage have won Nobel Prizes — all in chemistry — demonstrating how immigrant talent, nurtured by American institutions, advances the frontiers of human knowledge.

Ahmed Zewail (1946–2016), an Egyptian-American at the California Institute of Technology, won the 1999 Nobel Prize for pioneering femtochemistry — using ultrafast laser pulses measured in femtoseconds to observe atoms in motion during chemical reactions. The Nobel Committee stated that he allowed humanity, for the first time, to observe in slow motion what happens as the reaction barrier is crossed. The first Caltech faculty member named to the Linus Pauling Chair, Zewail published some six hundred research articles, served on President Obama’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, and became one of the first United States Science Envoys to the Muslim world. He was the first Egyptian and the first Arab to win a Nobel Prize in the sciences.

Aziz Sancar (b. 1946), a Turkish-American at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, shared the 2015 Nobel Prize for mapping the mechanism of nucleotide excision repair — showing how enzymes repair DNA damaged by ultraviolet light, with critical implications for the understanding of cancer and ageing. An openly practising Muslim, Sancar donated his prize money to his eponymous foundation and his gold medal

to the Atatürk mausoleum. He was the first Turkish member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Moungi G. Bawendi (b. 1961), a Tunisian-American at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, shared the 2023 Nobel Prize for revolutionizing the synthesis of quantum dots — semiconductor nanocrystals with unique optical and electronic properties now used in displays, medical imaging, and solar cells. Born in Paris to a Tunisian mathematician, Bawendi's 1993 method of producing nearly perfect, size-controlled quantum dots transformed the field from theoretical curiosity to practical technology. All three laureates did their Nobel-winning work at elite American institutions, embodying how the nation's openness to immigrant talent fuels scientific leadership.

Each laureate's work reshaped its field. Ahmed Zewail, at the California Institute of Technology, used laser flashes lasting a few femtoseconds — a femtosecond being to a second as a second is to some thirty million years — to film atoms in the very act of forming and breaking bonds, founding the discipline of femtochemistry. Aziz Sancar, at the University of North Carolina, mapped the molecular machinery by which living cells detect and repair damaged DNA, work that underlies much of modern cancer medicine. Moungi Bawendi, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, devised the methods that made quantum dots — nanocrystals now found in television displays and medical imaging — uniform enough to be useful. Three immigrants and children of immigrants, three American laboratories, three frontiers of human knowledge advanced.

CHAPTER 5

A Culture of Generosity

American Muslim Philanthropy by the Numbers

Islamic faith places charitable giving at the centre of spiritual life. Zakāt — the obligatory donation of two and a half percent of accumulated wealth — is one of the five pillars of Islam, while ṣadaqa encompasses all voluntary charity beyond this floor. These principles translate powerfully into the American context.

The Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy found that Muslim Americans gave an estimated 4.3 billion dollars in total charitable contributions in 2021. The average Muslim American household donated 3,242 dollars, compared with 1,905 dollars for the general population; of this, 1.8 billion dollars was zakāt alone. Muslim Americans also volunteered sixty-seven hours annually for faith-based causes and forty-six for non-faith causes, against twelve and fourteen hours respectively for the general population.

A critical finding challenges common misperceptions: eighty-five percent of Muslim American charitable giving supports American causes, with only fifteen to sixteen percent directed to international recipients. Muslim Americans gave a higher share toward civil-rights causes than any other faith group and contributed disproportionately to COVID-19 relief. Major Muslim American philanthropic institutions have stewarded more than twenty-six million dollars to over a thousand non-profits through some 255 donor-advised funds — an infrastructure of generosity, rooted in a fourteen-century tradition of obligatory and voluntary giving, that

represents one of the most distinctive Muslim contributions to American civil society.

Generosity in Islam is not left to sentiment; it is structured. The obligatory alms (*zakāt*), reckoned at roughly two and a half percent of accumulated wealth each year, is one of the five pillars of the faith, and is supplemented by voluntary giving (*ṣadaqa*) and by the endowment (*waqf*) that built mosques, schools, fountains, and hospitals across the historic Muslim world. American Muslims have carried that discipline into their new home. Surveys of charitable behaviour have repeatedly found them giving to religious and secular causes alike at rates that meet or exceed the national average, and the community has built a dense infrastructure of relief organizations, free clinics, food pantries, and disaster-response networks that serve neighbours far beyond its own ranks.

CHAPTER 6

The Islamic Foundations of Western and American Knowledge

The intellectual tradition underlying American science runs through the Islamic Golden Age. This is not a matter of cultural courtesy but of documented historical transmission. Islamic scholars translated, preserved, critiqued, and advanced Greek, Persian, and Indian knowledge from the eighth through the thirteenth centuries; the Toledo School of Translators rendered these works into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and European universities built upon them through the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution that culminated in the Enlightenment tradition America inherited.

Al-Khwārizmī (c. 780–850), working at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, wrote *al-Kitāb al-mukhtaṣar fī ḥisāb al-jabr wa-l-muqābala* — the foundational text of algebra, whose very name derives from *al-jabr* in the title. The Latinized form of his name, *Algoritmi*, gave English the word “algorithm,” and his treatise on Hindu-Arabic numerals introduced the decimal positional system that replaced Roman numerals across Europe.

Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen, c. 965–1040) authored the *Kitāb al-manāẓir* (Book of Optics), which correctly proved that vision occurs because light enters the eye, overturning the emission theory held since antiquity. His insistence on systematic experimentation and empirical evidence is widely credited as a forerunner of the modern scientific method, and the Latin

translation profoundly influenced Roger Bacon, Leonardo da Vinci, and Johannes Kepler.

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, 980–1037) produced the *Canon of Medicine*, a five-volume encyclopaedia translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona that served as a standard medical text in European universities for more than five hundred years. Al-Zahrāwī (Albucasis, 936–1013), the father of modern surgery, invented over two hundred surgical instruments, many still in use; and al-Rāzī (Rhazes) published the first systematic differentiation between smallpox and measles.

In astronomy, the majority of traditional Western star names are Arabic in origin — Aldebaran, Betelgeuse, Algol, Rigel, Vega, Altair, Deneb — along with technical terms such as azimuth, nadir, and zenith. The geometric device of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–1274), the “Ṭūsī couple,” appears in Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus* with virtually identical geometry and lettering, suggesting a direct line of influence from Islamic to Copernican astronomy, as George Saliba argues. In philosophy, Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198) produced commentaries on Aristotle so precise that medieval Europe understood the Greek philosopher primarily through his eyes; Thomas Aquinas called him simply “the Commentator,” and Latin Averroism became a major movement at the universities of Paris and Padua.

The transmission ran through institutions as much as through texts. The teaching hospital (the *bīmāristān*), the licensed pharmacy, systematic clinical observation, and the practice of examining a scholar’s work before his peers all have roots in the medical culture of the medieval Islamic world. Paper-making, learned at Samarkand in the eighth century and carried westward through Baghdad, Cairo, and Muslim Spain, reached Christian Europe centuries before the printing press it would make possible. Even the college — with its endowment (*waqf*), its faculties, and its licence to teach — finds an antecedent in the *madrasa*. What Europe received from the

Islamic world was not merely a library but a way of producing and authorizing knowledge.

CHAPTER 7

Shared Values and the Medinan Covenant

Commerce, Freedom, and the Rule of Law

The compatibility between Islamic and American values runs deeper than intellectual history. The Prophet Muhammad was a merchant, and Islamic civilization grew on the basis of a sophisticated mercantile economy with highly developed laws of contract, partnership (*muḍāraba*, *mushāraka*), and commercial transaction — centuries before comparable developments in Europe. The Qur’anic injunction that “there is no compulsion in religion” (2:256) articulates a principle of religious liberty that resonates with the First Amendment, and the Islamic legal tradition’s elaborate system of judicial reasoning, analogical deduction, and rule of law anticipates many features of the constitutionalist tradition America embraces.

The Constitution of Medina: An Ancient Model for American Pluralism

In approximately 622 CE, upon his migration (*hijra*) to Yathrib (later Medina), the Prophet Muhammad drafted a document known as the *Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna* — a written compact governing a diverse community of Muslim emigrants, local Arab tribes both Muslim and pagan, and Jewish clans including the Banū Qaynuqāʿ, Banū al-Naḍīr, and Banū Qurayza. The document, preserved in Ibn Ishāq’s *Sīra* and accepted as authentic by the overwhelming majority of Western scholars, contains some forty-seven clauses establishing governance by mutual consent.

The Constitution declared all signatories one umma distinct from all other people, uniting diverse religious and tribal groups under a single political framework. It guaranteed that the Jews would have their religion and the Muslims theirs, mandated mutual defence against external attack, and created dispute-resolution mechanisms with Muhammad as final arbiter. The parallels to American founding documents are structural rather than merely rhetorical. Like the Mayflower Compact of 1620, the Medinan charter was a covenant among migrant communities arriving in new territory, founding governance through voluntary agreement rather than inherited authority; like the First Amendment, it protected religious exercise within a shared political framework.

Its central concept — that diverse communities constitute one body politic — echoes the American motto *e pluribus unum*. Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh called it the first written constitution in the world, while Saïd Amir Arjomand has characterized it as proto-Islamic public law. In an age that has learned to call such arrangements pluralism, the Medinan covenant stands as an early and remarkably durable attempt to bind difference into a single polity by reciprocal obligation.

CHAPTER 8

Making America Stronger

Muslim Americans in Every Field

Muslim Americans are among the most racially diverse religious communities in the nation — the only major faith group with no majority race, comprising approximately twenty-six percent white, eighteen percent Asian, eighteen percent Arab, nine percent Black, seven percent mixed race, and five percent Hispanic. With an estimated population of between 3.45 and 4.5 million, they are also among the most educated: forty-six percent hold college degrees or higher, against thirty-eight percent of the general public, and more than one in four holds a postgraduate degree.

In politics, Muslim Americans have broken new ground. Keith Ellison became the first Muslim elected to Congress in 2006, taking his ceremonial oath on Thomas Jefferson's personal copy of the Qur'an; in 2025, forty-two Muslim Americans won public office across the country, including historic firsts at the municipal and statewide levels. In the military, an estimated five thousand serve on active duty. Captain Humayun Khan, a University of Virginia graduate, was killed near Baqubah, Iraq, in 2004 while moving toward a suspicious vehicle to protect his men, and was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart; Abdullah Igram, a veteran of the Second World War, successfully campaigned in 1953 to have Islam recognized on military dog tags.

In sport, the lineage runs from Muhammad Ali through Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Hakeem Olajuwon to Ibtiyah Muhammad, the first American woman to compete at the Olympics in hijab. In arts and culture, Mahershala

Ali became the first Muslim actor to win an Academy Award; Dave Chappelle, a convert to Islam, ranks among the nation's most celebrated comedians; and Ramy Youssef created the first television series centred on a Muslim American family. In technology and business, Jawed Karim co-founded YouTube, Salman Khan founded Khan Academy, Shahid Khan built a manufacturing empire, and Anousheh Ansari became the first Muslim woman to travel to space. In medicine, Muslim Americans are significantly over-represented, and during the COVID-19 pandemic Muslim American health-care workers were disproportionately on the front lines.

The community's civic footprint has widened with each generation. Muslim Americans serve as physicians and nurses in numbers well above their share of the population, as engineers and entrepreneurs, as soldiers and police officers, as teachers, imams, and elected officials. They have built more than two thousand five hundred mosques, hundreds of full-time schools, and a dense network of charities, professional associations, and civil-rights organizations — the institutional furniture of a community that has decided, unmistakably, that it is home.

CHAPTER 9

Articulating an American Islam

Challenges and Institutional Growth

Muslim Americans confront the reality that a violent fringe has distorted global perceptions of their faith. The data, however, are unambiguous: a 2017 Pew study found that seventy-six percent of American Muslims say the targeting and killing of civilians can never be justified, compared with fifty-nine percent of the general public, while eighty-two percent expressed concern about extremism committed in the name of Islam.

Muslim American institutions have responded with theological rigour. The 2014 open letter to al-Baghdadi, signed by more than 126 scholars worldwide, offered a twenty-four-point refutation of the so-called Islamic State drawn from the Qur'an, ḥadīth, and classical jurisprudence; translated into ten languages and endorsed by scholars of al-Azhar, it stands among the most comprehensive intra-Muslim rejections of extremism ever produced. A distinctive institutional infrastructure has also emerged: Zaytuna College, co-founded by Hamza Yusuf, became the first accredited Muslim liberal-arts college in the United States in 2015, combining a great-books curriculum with traditional seminary learning.

Perhaps the most remarkable chapter in this institutional development is the transformation led by Warith Deen Mohammed (1933–2008). Upon the death of his father, Elijah Muhammad, in 1975, he took leadership of the Nation of Islam and systematically dismantled its racial theology — rejecting the deification of Wallace Fard Muhammad, introducing the five pillars, and welcoming worshippers of every race. He led more African

Americans toward Sunni Islam than any figure in history and, in 1992, became the first Muslim to deliver the opening prayer before a session of the United States Senate.

Today, Muslim American scholars are developing a distinctly American Islamic intellectual tradition. Sherman Jackson argues for understanding Islam through the lens of Black American experience; Umar Faruq Abd-Allah likens Islam to a crystal-clear river whose waters reflect the bedrock over which they flow — in China looking Chinese, in Mali African — with the clear implication that in America Islam should look American; and Khaled Abou El Fadl advances Islamic jurisprudence in dialogue with human rights and democratic values. Interfaith bridge-building has become a hallmark of this emerging identity, from the Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha to the Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council and the Sisterhood of Salaam-Shalom. The scholarly and institutional work of the East-West Foundation represents a pioneering effort to reposition American Islam from a reactive, post-9/11 posture to a civilizational faith capable of co-authoring America's pluralist project — arguing that Islam possesses indigenous resources, covenantal ethics chief among them, that do not merely accommodate American democracy but can actively renew it.

The scaffolding of this American Islam was raised in a single generation. The Muslim Students Association, founded in 1963 on Midwestern campuses, gave rise two decades later to the Islamic Society of North America, and alongside it a thicket of professional and scholarly bodies — associations of Muslim physicians and social scientists, seminaries, and the Fiqh Council of North America, convened to address in Islamic terms the questions a minority faces in a non-Muslim land. Out of that effort grew a distinct body of reasoning, the “jurisprudence of minorities” (*fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*) associated with the scholar Taha Jabir al-Alwani, which held that faithful Muslim life in a country like the United States was not a grudging exception to be tolerated but a vocation to be embraced — a position later

deepened by American thinkers such as Sherman Jackson and Khaled Abou El Fadl.

CHAPTER 10

The Future Belongs to Bridge-Builders

The story told in these pages is not one of a community seeking acceptance. It is a story of co-authorship. Muslims were present when the first treaty was signed, when the rice fields were planted, when the blues were born, when the Supreme Court expanded religious freedom, and when chemical bonds were photographed in femtoseconds. The question for the future is not whether American Muslims belong — history answers that — but what new chapters they will write.

The community's unique position — racially diverse, highly educated, civically engaged, and drawing on a civilization that helped build the intellectual foundations of the modern world — makes it a natural force for the bridge-building, innovation, and pluralism that America's future demands. As Umar Faruq Abd-Allah's metaphor suggests, the task is not to import a foreign Islam but to let Islamic values flow through American bedrock, producing something authentically both: a community fully Muslim and fully American, contributing to the ongoing American project of forging unity from diversity.

The thread that runs through these chapters is older than the republic and older than the faith's arrival on these shores: the conviction that a people of many tribes and creeds can bind themselves, by covenant, into a single body politic without surrendering what makes them distinct. It is the logic of the Compact of Medina and the logic of the First Amendment alike. The Muslim American story, rightly read, is not a petition for inclusion in someone else's country. It is a long demonstration that the American

experiment in plural self-government has, from the beginning, had Muslim hands at its work — and that its future depends on citizens of every faith willing to keep that covenant still.

EPILOGUE

Mending a Fractured Republic

American Muslims and the Covenantal Work of Pluralism

America at its semiquincentennial confronts a paradox. The republic has never been more diverse, yet its citizens have rarely felt more estranged from one another. Political scientists describe the condition as affective polarization — a deepening tendency of Americans to distrust, dislike, and avoid those who differ from them, not over policy alone but as a matter of social identity. The fragmentation is not merely partisan; it corrodes the everyday bonds of neighbourliness, civic association, and religious life on which self-government depends. Scholars of American pluralism warn that the very conditions for cross-difference solidarity — religious freedom, religious literacy, and the civic virtues that sustain a shared life — face an uphill climb in the contemporary United States.

Into this moment the American Muslim community brings resources that are easily overlooked: not only the bridge-building disposition documented throughout these pages, but a civilizational inheritance uniquely suited to the task of holding difference together. Fourteen centuries before “pluralism” entered the political lexicon, the compact the Prophet Muhammad drew up upon his migration to Medina bound a diverse population into a single body politic while expressly preserving each community’s distinct faith. Modern scholarship reads this *Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna* as an early act of constitutional thinking — a written covenant founding a community by mutual consent rather than by conquest. Its central intuition, that peoples who do not share a creed can nonetheless

share a polity bound by reciprocal obligation, anticipates what scholars now call covenantal pluralism: a vision that moves beyond thin tolerance toward a robust, relational solidarity in which citizens of profoundly different convictions commit to one another's flourishing.

This is no abstract analogy. The Qur'anic teaching that God created humankind as nations and tribes that they may come to know one another (49:13) frames diversity itself as a divine intention and mutual recognition (*ta'āruf*) as a religious duty — a theological warrant for precisely the neighbourly engagement a polarized society most needs. And the empirical record refutes the old claim that Islamic devotion is incompatible with democratic life: drawing on a large national survey, researchers have shown that the mosque functions much as the church and synagogue long have in American history, as a school of civic integration that strengthens both American identity and political participation among the most actively engaged in worship.

The implication for America's next chapter is clear. The same tradition that produced the Medinan covenant, that broadened the nation's protections for conscience through Muhammad Ali's stand, and that today raises mosques and synagogues on shared ground offers the republic a tested grammar of difference. American Muslims are positioned not to request a seat at a fracturing table but to help rebuild the table itself — modelling how communities divided by conviction can be united by covenant. To strengthen religious freedom and repair a frayed social fabric, the nation does not need its citizens to believe the same things. It needs them to know one another, and to keep faith with one another across what they cannot share. That work — ancient in Islam and urgent in America — is a contribution the American Muslim community is singularly prepared to make to the common project of forging one people out of many.

None of this guarantees an easy future. Suspicion has a long half-life, and the temptation — for any minority — to retreat into grievance or seclusion

is real. But the covenantal tradition offers a different counsel: that security is found not in the goodwill of the powerful but in shared institutions and mutual obligation; that justice is owed even to those one has reason to resent; and that difference, rightly held, is not a threat to be managed but a trust to be kept. These are old Muslim instincts. They are also, at their best, American ones.

APPENDIX

A Documentary Reader

This reader gathers the texts from which the story told in these pages is woven: the founding treaties and charters that first bound the Republic to the Muslim world and set the terms of its religious liberty, the scripture and the Medinan covenant that underlie the Islamic disposition toward shared life, the voices of American Muslims across four centuries, and — as the contemporary term of that long tradition — a covenant for the present age. Each section may be read on its own; the questions that accompany the study companion are offered for discussion at the table, in the classroom, or in the study circle.

PART ONE • FOUNDING DOCUMENTS

The Moroccan–American Treaty of Friendship

Marrakesh, 1786; ratified by the United States Congress, 1787

Negotiated by the American consul Thomas Barclay and sealed by Sultan Sidi Mohammed III, the treaty of peace and friendship between the United States and Morocco was the first such agreement between the new republic and any sovereign state, and the first with a Muslim power. Uniquely among the Barbary treaties, it required no tribute. Renewed without alteration in 1836, it remains the longest unbroken treaty relationship in American history. Its twenty-five articles regulate trade, the treatment of vessels and shipwrecked sailors, and the conduct of consuls.

Article 6 provides that if any vessel of either party should be in distress and put into a port of the other, it shall be treated with humanity and given every assistance, its goods restored, and no part of them seized. Article 10 holds that if a vessel of either nation is attacked by an enemy within cannon-shot of a fort of the other, it shall be defended and protected as far as possible. Article 24 binds both nations to a lasting peace: should any difference arise, no act of hostility shall be committed until the matter has first been laid before the sovereign and a redress sought.

The treaty's significance lies less in any single clause than in its existence: at the founding, a Muslim monarch and a Christian-majority republic chose to bind

themselves to one another by written, reciprocal obligation rather than by force or faith — a small rehearsal, on the world stage, of the covenantal logic this book traces.

The Treaty of Tripoli, Article 11

Tripoli, 1796; ratified by the United States Senate, June 7, 1797

Concluded under President Washington and ratified unanimously under President Adams — who signed it and proclaimed it the law of the land — the Treaty of Tripoli contains, in the English version transmitted by the diplomat Joel Barlow, one of the early Republic's most often-quoted statements on religion and the state. The article is reproduced here in full from the public record.

“As the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility of Musselmen; and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.”

Whatever the complexities of its textual history, Article 11 was read aloud in the Senate, ratified without a dissenting voice, and published to the nation — a founding-era affirmation that the American state took no religious establishment as its basis and bore no enmity toward Islam.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution

Proposed by Congress, 1789; ratified December 15, 1791

The legal architecture within which every American faith has since lived was set in a single sentence. Its first sixteen words — the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses — forbid the state both to establish a religion and to obstruct its practice. For a Muslim minority, as for every other, they are the ground on which the right to build a mosque, to pray, and to bear public witness ultimately rests.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

The framers wrote no exception for the unfamiliar faith. The same clauses that protect the Baptist and the Catholic protect the Muslim — a point the courts have affirmed from the conscientious-objector cases to the contemporary defense of the right to wear religious dress and to assemble for worship.

George Washington's Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport

Newport, Rhode Island, August 18, 1790

Replying to a letter of welcome from Moses Seixas of the Touro Synagogue, President Washington set down what remains the most luminous early statement of American religious liberty. Though addressed to a Jewish congregation, its principle reaches every faith that has since made its home in the Republic, and it speaks, in its closing image, the shared Abrahamic language at the heart of this book.

"The Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

Liberty of conscience, Washington insisted, was no longer to be spoken of as toleration — as though the enjoyment of natural rights were the indulgence of one class to another — but as an inherent right of all. He closed with a blessing upon "the children of the Stock of Abraham who dwell in this land," a family in which Jew, Christian, and Muslim alike have claimed a place.

PART TWO · SCRIPTURE AND COVENANT

The Compact of Medina (Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna)

Medina, c. 1 AH / 622 CE; preserved in the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq. Editor's rendering.

On his migration from Mecca to the oasis of Yathrib — thereafter Medina — the Prophet Muhammad drew up a written agreement binding the Muslim emigrants, the Arab clans of the town, and its Jewish tribes into a single community for the purposes of common defense and the administration of justice, while leaving each its own religion. Accepted as substantially authentic by the great majority of modern scholars, it is among the earliest constitutional documents known. Its principal clauses are rendered below.

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is a writing of Muhammad the Prophet between the believers and the Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who follow them, are joined to them, and strive alongside them.
2. They are one community (umma) distinct from all other people.
3. The emigrants of Quraysh shall keep their own customs, paying and receiving blood-money among themselves, and ransoming their captives with the fairness and justice common among the believers; and each clan of the Anṣār likewise shall keep its own customs as before.
4. The believers shall not leave anyone burdened by debt or hardship among them without aid, helping him in fairness toward ransom or blood-money.

5. No believer shall make an alliance against another believer, nor side with an unbeliever against a believer.
6. The protection (dhimma) of God is one and indivisible; the least of the believers may extend protection binding upon them all, for the believers are allies (mawālī) to one another, to the exclusion of other people.
7. Whoever of the Jews follows us shall have aid and the like treatment, so long as they are not wronged and no enemy is helped against them.
8. The peace of the believers is one: no believer shall make peace apart from another believer in fighting in the way of God, save on a basis of equality and justice among them.
9. The Jews shall bear their expenses and the believers theirs; and there is mutual aid between them against whoever wars upon the people of this document. Between them there is sincere counsel, good faith, and honourable dealing without treachery.
10. The Jews of Banū ‘Awf are a community alongside the believers — to the Jews their religion (dīn) and to the Muslims theirs — including their clients and themselves, save one who does wrong or commits a crime, for he brings ruin only upon himself and his household. The same is granted to the Jews of the other clans of the town.
11. None of them shall go forth to war without the leave of Muhammad, yet none is restrained from taking revenge for a wound; and whoever acts treacherously brings it upon himself and his household.
12. The valley of Yathrib shall be a sanctuary (ḥaram) for the people of this document.
13. Whatever dispute or quarrel arises among the people of this document from which trouble is feared shall be referred to God and to Muhammad the Messenger of God; God is the most watchful and faithful keeper of what is in this document.
14. A believer shall not be slain for the sake of an unbeliever, nor shall an unbeliever be aided against a believer.
15. The Jews of Banū al-Najjār, Banū al-Ḥārith, Banū Sā‘ida, Banū Jusham, Banū al-Aws, and Banū Tha‘laba shall have the same standing as the Jews of Banū ‘Awf; and the close allies (biṭāna) of the Jews are as themselves.
16. Each party shall bear the cost of its own quarter, and the people of this document owe one another counsel and aid against whoever makes war upon its people.
17. Whoever goes out to fight is safe, and whoever remains in Medina is safe, save one who has done wrong or committed a crime.
18. When the people of this document are summoned to a peace that they may enter and uphold, they shall enter and uphold it; and when they summon the believers to the like, it shall be granted them, save against one who wages war over religion.
19. It shall not be lawful for a believer who holds to what is in this document, and who believes in God and the Last Day, to aid an evildoer or to give him shelter; upon whoever does so shall be the displeasure of God on the Day of Resurrection, and nothing shall be taken from him in recompense.

20. Quraysh and their helpers shall be given no protection, but there shall be mutual help against whoever attacks the people of this document.
21. Honourable dealing comes before treachery, and what is in this document shall not shield a wrongdoer; God is the protector of him who acts faithfully and with piety, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

The Qur'an on Pluralism, Covenant, and Conscience

The following passages, gathered from across the Qur'an, articulate the scriptural disposition toward difference, justice, and shared life that recurs throughout this book. The Arabic is given first, followed by the editor's rendering and a brief note.

Sūrat al-Baqara 2:256

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۖ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

There is no compulsion in religion; right guidance has become distinct from error.

A foundational text of Islamic thought on freedom of conscience, frequently set beside the religion clauses of the First Amendment.

Sūrat al-Ḥujurat 49:13

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوا

O humankind, We created you from a single male and female and made you into peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. The noblest of you before God is the most mindful of Him.

Difference is framed not as a problem to be erased but as an invitation to mutual acquaintance (ta'aruf).

Sūrat al-Mā'ida 5:8

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۚ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ
شَتَانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلا تَعْدِلُوا

O you who believe, be steadfast for God, witnesses in justice; and let not the hatred of a people lead you to be unfair. Be just — that is nearer to mindfulness of God.

Justice is owed even toward those one dislikes — a discipline at the heart of citizenship in a plural society.

Sūrat al-Mā'ida 5:48

لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا ۚ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۚ
فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ

For each of you We appointed a law and a way. Had God willed, He would have made you a single community — but to test you in what He has given you. So vie with one another in good works.

Plurality of law and community is presented as willed by God, with virtuous rivalry, not uniformity, as the response.

Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana 60:8

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ
أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ

God does not forbid you from being kind and just toward those who have not fought you over religion nor driven you from your homes. Indeed, God loves the just.

The baseline of relations with those of other faiths who are not hostile is kindness (birr) and equity (qist).

Sūrat Āl 'Imrān 3:64

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ

Say: People of the Book, come to a word held in common between us and you.

The verse that gave its name to the modern "Common Word" initiative between Muslim and Christian scholars.

Sūrat al-Ḥajj 22:40

وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَهْدِمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيْعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ
وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا

Were it not for God's restraining some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques — in which God's name is much remembered — would have been destroyed.

A rare scriptural defense of the houses of worship of other faiths as worthy of protection.

Sūrat al-Rūm 30:22

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and your colours. Surely in that are signs for those who know.

Human difference of language and colour is named not as accident or curse but as a sign (āya) of God, set among the wonders of creation.

Sūrat Hūd 11:118

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۚ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ

Had your Lord willed, He would have made humankind one community; yet they do not cease to differ.

Plurality is presented as part of the divine design for the world, not a condition to be abolished.

Sūrat al-Baqara 2:62

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنَ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ

Those who believe, and the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians — whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord.

A verse long cited in debates over salvation beyond the bounds of one community.

Sūrat al-Nahl 16:90

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

God commands justice, the doing of good, and generosity toward kin.

Recited at the close of the Friday sermon across the Muslim world; a compact statement of the social ethic.

Sūrat Ibrāhīm 14:7

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

And recall when your Lord proclaimed: if you are grateful, I will surely increase you.

Gratitude (shukr) for benefits received is tied to their increase — a basis, for jurists of Muslim minorities, of the duty of civic participation.

Sūrat al-Kāfirūn 109:6

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

To you your religion, and to me mine.

The closing verse of a short Meccan sūra, often cited as a concise charter of religious coexistence.

PART THREE • A STUDY COMPANION: VOICES OF AMERICAN ISLAM

Democracy and Muslim Thriving

Safety in a Compact, Not in a Ruler's Mood

In its first year, the Muslim community at Medina was not a homogeneous flock but a plural city. The Prophet's answer was a written compact, often called the Constitution of Medina, binding distinct religious communities into one body politic for the purposes of defence and justice while guaranteeing each its own faith.

The Compact of Medina (Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna)

c. 1 AH / 622 CE, as preserved in Ibn Ishāq's Sīra (excerpt, paraphrased)

The believers and those who follow them form a single community (umma) distinct from all other people. The Jews of the city's clans are one community alongside the believers — to the Jews their religion and to the Muslims theirs. Whoever among them is wronged shall be helped; none shall be wronged, and no enemy shall be aided against them. Between the parties there is mutual counsel and good faith, and disputes that threaten the peace are referred to God and to His Messenger for arbitration.

Questions for Discussion

The Compact grounds the safety of a minority in a written, mutual agreement rather than in the goodwill of a ruler. What are the strengths of staking our security on shared institutions and law? Are there risks?

The American Constitution makes a similar wager. Why should Muslims remain invested in constitutional pluralism today, and what might it look like to express that commitment specifically as Muslims?

The Qur'an on Standing for Justice

The Qur'an does not make justice contingent on whether others are just to us. It is the rare scripture that commands fairness even toward those one dislikes — a discipline at the heart of democratic citizenship.

Sūrat al-Mā'ida 5:8

author's rendering

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ

“O you who believe, stand firm for God as witnesses to justice. Do not let your hatred of a people lead you away from fairness. Be just — that is nearer to God-consciousness.”

Questions for Discussion

The verse forbids letting hostility, even justified hostility, corrupt our fairness. Why might this be especially demanding for a community that feels itself under suspicion?

How does the duty to be just toward everyone, friend and adversary alike, equip Muslims to be reliable partners in a pluralistic democracy?

Expressing Our Islam in America

The Burden — and the Gift — of Being Known

A recurring fear in minority life is the fear of being misread. The Qur'an answers that fear not by demanding that difference disappear, but by giving it a purpose: human variety exists so that we might come to know one another. The verb is *li-ta'ārafū*, mutual acquaintance — the opposite of caricature.

Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt 49:13

author's rendering

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوا

“O humankind, We created you from a single male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another. The most honoured of you before God is the most mindful of Him.”

Questions for Discussion

The verse treats difference as an invitation to acquaintance, not a problem to be erased. Are there moments when you feel your Islam is misunderstood by neighbours or coworkers, and how do you respond?

Being known on our own terms obligates us to know others on theirs. When have you misread someone else's tradition, and what helped you understand it better?

Keith Ellison and Jefferson's Qur'an

In January 2007, Keith Ellison of Minnesota, the first Muslim elected to Congress, chose for his ceremonial oath a Qur'an that had belonged to Thomas Jefferson, borrowed from the Library of Congress. The gesture answered those who doubted whether a Muslim could be fully American by pointing back to a Founder who had owned and read the Book.

Keith Ellison and Jefferson's Qur'an

U.S. House of Representatives, ceremonial swearing-in, January 4, 2007

Ellison's response to his critics was not to minimize his faith but to root it in the nation's founding: he placed his hand on a two-volume English Qur'an that Thomas Jefferson had purchased as a young man in 1765. The image collapsed the supposed distance between "Muslim" and "American," affirming that a Founder's curiosity about Islam and a citizen's practice of it belong to the same long story.

Questions for Discussion

Muslim officials, like Jewish public figures before them, are frequently pressed to explain themselves on questions of faith and loyalty. Why does the demand for explanation fall so heavily on minorities, and is that burden ours to carry?

Ellison answered suspicion with a claim on the American past. What other texts, histories, or symbols might Muslims draw on to express their faith confidently in public life, on their own terms?

*At Home in America***Putting Down Roots in Hard Ground**

Long before the great immigrations, a Muslim wrote his life story in America — in Arabic, in bondage. Omar ibn Said, a scholar from Futa Toro in present-day Senegal, was enslaved and shipped to Charleston around 1807. In 1831 he composed the only known autobiography written in Arabic

by an enslaved person in the United States, opening with the Qur'an and weaving scripture through the account of his captivity.

The Life of Omar ibn Said, Written by Himself

manuscript autobiography, North Carolina, 1831 (described)

Omar ibn Said begins not with his own name but with God's, copying out a chapter of the Qur'an from memory before turning to his life. The manuscript's very existence is its argument: a Muslim mind, literate and devout, present at the heart of American slavery, insisting on its own interior life when the law granted it none.

Questions for Discussion

Omar ibn Said's America was a place of profound injustice, yet he made it the setting of a deeply Islamic act of witness. What does it mean to claim belonging in a country that has not always claimed you?

What is your own family's story of arrival — by ship, by migration, by conversion — and how does it shape the way you understand "home"?

An American Muslim Identity

After 1975, Imam W. Deen Mohammed led the largest body of African American Muslims out of the Nation of Islam into mainstream Sunni Islam, and with it toward a confident American identity: he embraced the Constitution, urged his followers to register and vote, and taught that there was no contradiction between being fully Muslim and fully American.

An American Muslim Identity

the teaching of Imam W. Deen Mohammed (1933–2008), summarized

For Imam Mohammed, America was not a temporary exile to be endured but a homeland to be claimed and improved. He taught that the Qur'an's ethics found a natural ally in American constitutional freedoms, and that gratitude, work, and full participation were themselves forms of worship. His followers were to be neither separatists nor strangers, but believing citizens — at home, with no other home wanted.

Questions for Discussion

Imam Mohammed expressed a sense of complete belonging in America. Do you share it? Are there risks in treating America as our only home, and how might we guard against them?

He framed civic participation as continuous with faith. Where do you see your religious commitments and your American citizenship reinforcing one another?

Gratitude and the Duty to Participate

Does Islam oblige a Muslim to take part in American civic life — to vote? A growing body of scholarship on the jurisprudence of minorities (*fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*) has answered yes, framing participation as a duty of gratitude and of securing the common good. The key concept is *shukr* — the recognition and return of a benefit.

Sūrat Ibrāhīm 14:7

author's rendering, with the fiqh of Muslim minorities

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

“If you are grateful, I will surely give you more.” Jurists of Muslim-minority life have argued that the freedoms a Muslim enjoys in a constitutional democracy — to worship, to build mosques, to speak and organize — carry obligations. To register, to vote, to serve on a jury, to run for office: these are read not merely as rights but as expressions of *shukr*, gratitude made active.

Questions for Discussion

In America, voting is a right but not a legal obligation. Do you vote, and do you experience it as a religious duty, a civic one, both, or neither?

If gratitude is owed for the freedoms we enjoy, what forms might it take beyond the ballot box — in service, in defending others' rights, in building institutions?

One Minority Among Many

Our Destiny Tied to Others' Wellbeing

No American Muslim story can be told without the Black American Muslim story at its centre, and no figure carried that truth further than Malcolm X. In April 1964 he made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and there, among pilgrims of every colour worshipping as equals, he revised the racial theology of his earlier years.

El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz at Mecca

Malcolm X, letter from the Hajj, April 1964 (paraphrased)

From Mecca, Malcolm wrote that he had stood, eaten, slept, and prayed alongside pilgrims whose skin ran from the whitest to the blackest, and that in their shared rites he had witnessed a unity that defied everything America had taught him

about race. He did not abandon his demand for Black freedom; he deepened it, now grounded in a faith that recognized one human family before God.

Questions for Discussion

Malcolm's experience of Islam's universality changed how he fought for justice but did not soften his commitment to it. How can faith in human equality before God sharpen, rather than dull, the pursuit of justice on earth?

The Qur'an calls Muslims a community of witness (2:143). To what, and to whom, are American Muslims called to bear witness today?

Muhammad Ali and the Cost of Conscience

If Malcolm showed how faith could reframe the struggle, Muhammad Ali showed what it could cost — and what it could move. In 1967, at the height of his fame, Ali refused induction into the armed forces as an ordained Muslim minister opposed to the war, and in 1971 a unanimous Supreme Court reversed his conviction in *Clay v. United States*.

Muhammad Ali and the Cost of Conscience

Clay v. United States, 403 U.S. 698 (1971); *draft refusal*, 1967 (*described*)

Ali grounded his refusal to fight in his faith, insisting that his religion forbade his participation in that war, and bore the public cost willingly. When the Court vindicated him, it did so on the narrow ground of his sincere religious objection — but the larger lesson outlasted the ruling: that a Muslim, acting openly from belief, could bend the moral arc of his country.

Questions for Discussion

For Ali, religious conviction and public action were inseparable. Are your own commitments shaped by your faith? What are the risks and rewards of letting religion inform our politics?

When have Muslim practices, ideas, or figures moved the world? What might it mean for American Muslims to move it further — through a deeper, not a quieter, embrace of who they are?

PART FOUR · A CONTEMPORARY COVENANT

Mithāq al-Ta'āruf

The Covenant of Mutual Acquaintance

A declaration on faith, covenantal pluralism, and the common good. Its thirteen articles are presented here in full.

Modelled in form upon the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* and upon A Common Word Between Us and You, and grounded throughout in the Qur'an and the

prophetic example, the *Mithāq al-Ta'āruf* sets out an Islamic case for religious pluralism, universal human dignity, and interreligious partnership. It takes its name and its charge from the Qur'anic verse that runs through this whole volume — that God made the peoples and tribes “that you may come to know one another” (49:13) — and from the command to “race toward all that is good” (2:148). It is offered here as the contemporary term of the long covenantal tradition this book has traced, from Medina to the American founding and into the present.

PREAMBLE

We, as Muslim scholars, educators, and community leaders, speaking from within the great and merciful tradition of Islam, issue this declaration to our brothers and sisters in faith, to our fellow Abrahamic peoples — Jews and Christians — and to all humanity. We do so in a spirit of *taqwa* (God-consciousness), *'ilm* (knowledge), and *rahma* (mercy), the last being the supreme divine attribute by which God describes Himself in the opening verse recited by every Muslim in every prayer: *Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim* — the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

We write at a moment when misunderstanding, violence, polarization, and the weaponization of religious identity threaten the fabric of human civilization. We write at a moment when some Muslims, misreading our tradition, have brought dishonor upon our faith through acts of terror, antisemitism, and supremacist ideology. We write to bear witness — not to missionize — that Islam, rightly understood through the Quran and the authenticated *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be upon him), is a religion of flourishing, covenantal community, and universal mercy, not a religion of perpetual warfare, domination, or the degradation of those outside our community of faith.

This declaration draws its authority from the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Quran, the authenticated practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the constitutional precedent of the Covenant of Medina (*Sahifat al-Madina*), the historical example of the Hijra to Abyssinia, and the growing scholarly consensus of Muslim scholars across

the globe who affirm that religious pluralism, human dignity, and covenantal hospitality are not concessions to modernity but the living heart of the Islamic tradition.

We speak to Muslims first. We ask ourselves the hardest questions. We acknowledge what has gone wrong within our institutions, our rhetoric, and our silence. And we commit, in the name of God, to leaving the world better than we found it — for our children, for our neighbors, and for all the children of Adam.

THE ARTICLES

Article I. On Our Shared Abrahamic Origins and Our Common Future

Say: O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you — that we will not worship except God.

— Q 3:64

We affirm with conviction and gratitude that Islam stands in an unbroken line of divine revelation beginning with the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), peace be upon him, whose submission to the One God is the foundation of our shared spiritual identity. We honor the Torah revealed to Musa (Moses), the Psalms given to Dawud (David), and the Gospel brought by 'Isa (Jesus), all of whom we revere as prophets of God. We affirm that the Children of Israel are a people chosen by God for a sacred covenant and entrusted with a divine mission of justice and witness. We affirm that Christians are a community of faith who have carried the message of love of God and love of neighbor across the centuries and to the ends of the earth.

The Quran does not ask us to see Jews and Christians as enemies. It asks us to see them as Ahl al-Kitab — People of the Book — recipients of prior divine revelation from the same God we worship. When the Quran says, “Our God and your God is one” (Q 29:46), it is not making a concession but a theological declaration: the God of Muhammad is the God of Moses and the God of Jesus. Our traditions share a common origin, a common moral

vision, and — we declare with confidence — a common future under the mercy of the One God.

The historic 2007 open letter *A Common Word Between Us and You*, endorsed by 138 Muslim scholars and addressed to Christian leaders worldwide, demonstrated that Islam's two great commandments — the love of God expressed through tawhid, and the love of neighbor expressed through the Prophet's ethical example — mirror the twin commandments Jesus identifies in the Gospel (Mark 12:29–31). This is not accommodation. This is recognition of the common ground on which Abrahamic civilization stands.

Article II. On the Dignity and Equal Worth of All Human Beings

And We have certainly honored the children of Adam.

— Q 17:70

The Quran's declaration that God has honored all the children of Adam — bani Adam — is categorical and unconditional. It makes no distinction of religion, ethnicity, nationality, or social standing. The classical scholar al-Alusi interpreted this verse to mean that every member of the human race, including the righteous and the sinner, is endowed with God-given dignity. This inherent dignity — *karama insaniyya* — is not a gift of the state or a privilege of the faithful. It belongs to every human being by virtue of creation alone.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) demonstrated this principle with his own body. When a funeral procession passed him — the funeral of a Jew — he stood. When companions noted that the deceased was Jewish, he replied: "Was he not a human being?" (Sahih al-Bukhari 1312; Sahih Muslim 961). This authenticated hadith — agreed upon by the two most authoritative hadith collections in the Sunni tradition — is not a footnote. It is a prophetic standard for how Muslims are to treat all human life: with standing respect.

We therefore affirm that every human being — regardless of religion, race, gender, national origin, sexual identity, immigration status, or economic condition — is worthy of equal rights and equal dignity. We reject any theology, political philosophy, or community norm that assigns lesser worth to any category of human person. Karama is not earned. It is given by God at the moment of creation, and no human authority may revoke it. This conviction must govern our politics, our jurisprudence, our treatment of minorities in Muslim-majority countries, and our engagement with non-Muslims everywhere.

Article III. On Salvation and the Possibility of Divine Mercy for All

Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabians — those who believed in God and the Last Day and did righteousness — will have their reward with their Lord.

— Q 2:62

The Quran does not restrict divine mercy and the possibility of salvation to Muslims alone. Quran 2:62 — repeated in substance in 5:69 — addresses Jews, Christians, and Sabians with the same salvific criteria applicable to Muslims: genuine belief in God, genuine belief in the Day of Reckoning, and righteous deeds. This is not theological relativism. It is a recognition that God is the judge of hearts, and that the judge of hearts is not us.

The classical tradition and contemporary Muslim scholarship alike confirm that the diversity of religious paths is not accidental but divinely intended. The Quran declares: “And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ — except those upon whom your Lord has bestowed mercy, and for that He created them” (Q 11:118–119). Commenting on Q 5:48 — “Had God willed, He would have made you one community, but He intended to test you in what He has given you; so race to all that is good” — classical and contemporary scholars argue that religious diversity is not a problem to be solved but a necessary

good through which humanity is called to moral competition and mutual challenge.

We do not claim the authority to determine who is saved. That authority belongs to God alone, Al-Ghaffar (the Forgiving), Al-Wadud (the Loving), Al-Rahman (the Compassionate). We commit to abandoning the theological chauvinism that assigns damnation to all who do not profess our exact creedal formulations, and we commit to trusting in the boundless mercy of the God we worship. Even the most doctrinally rigorous classical scholars — including al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, Ibn Taymiyya, and Rashid Rida — envisioned a God of mercy and justice whose Paradise was not sealed shut against all those outside the formal boundaries of Islam.

Article IV. On Witness, Not Mission: Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

Let there arise from among you a group inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong.

— Q 3:104

We do not approach our neighbors in other faith traditions as targets for conversion. We approach them as partners in the shared human project of building a more just, more compassionate, and more beautiful world. The Quran's call to *amr bil-ma'ruf wa-nahy 'an al-munkar* — enjoining good and forbidding evil — is a call to constructive ethical presence in the world, not to coercive religious proselytism. Our mission is to be *shuhada' 'ala al-nas* — witnesses unto humanity (Q 2:143) — through the quality of our character, the justice of our institutions, the generosity of our hospitality, and the integrity of our conduct.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Religion is sincere counsel" (Sahih Muslim 55). That counsel — *nasihah* — is first owed to God, then to His Book, then to His Messenger, then to the leaders of the Muslims, and then to all Muslims and indeed to all people. It is expressed not through

force or manipulation but through honest engagement, kind words, and the example of lived virtue. The Islamic tradition has paid more meticulous concern to this moral tenet than perhaps any other culture in history, but that concern is fundamentally about internal moral accountability and civic virtue, not religious imperialism.

We therefore declare that Islam's vocation in a pluralist world is not to empty the synagogues and churches of their congregants, but to fill the world with the fruits of taqwa: justice, mercy, knowledge, beauty, and the relief of suffering. We invite others not to Islam but to goodness. And we trust that goodness, wherever it is found, reflects the light of the God in whom we believe.

Article V. On the Covenant of Medina and the Model of Covenantal Pluralism

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) arrived in the city of Yathrib in 622 CE — a city with a substantial and established Jewish population — he did not arrive as a conqueror demanding submission or conversion. He arrived as a refugee seeking refuge in a pre-existing, multi-religious civic community. What he established there was not a theocracy but a covenant: the *Sahifat al-Madina* (the Charter of Medina), which scholars from Watt to Hamidullah have recognized as among the most remarkable constitutional documents of the ancient world.

The Covenant of Medina bound together Muslim immigrants (*Muhajirun*), Medinan Muslims (*Ansar*), and multiple Jewish tribes in a single *ummah* — a single civic community — with shared obligations of defense, mutual protection, internal autonomy, and collective responsibility. Clause 25 declares explicitly: “The Jews of Banu ‘Awf are one community (*umma*) along with the believers — for the Jews their religion, and for the Muslims theirs.” The territory itself was declared sacred (*haram*) for all parties.

This covenant — made not with an abstract Other but with a concrete, named, present community of Jews who were partners and neighbors — is not a historical curiosity. It is a prophetic standard. It tells us that the first Muslim community, shaped directly by revelation and by the Prophet's own governance, chose pluralism and partnership over exclusion and domination. It tells us that the Islamic model of civic life is not the caliphate imagined by modern totalitarians but the covenant community of Medina: a polity in which religious difference is protected, civic obligation is shared, and justice belongs to everyone.

The Marrakesh Declaration (2016), in which 250 Muslim scholars and leaders gathered to affirm the rights of religious minorities under Islamic law, explicitly invoked the Charter of Medina as the foundation of an Islamic concept of equal citizenship. We endorse that invocation. We declare that covenantal pluralism — the commitment to building civic community across religious difference, bound by shared obligations of justice and mutual protection — is not a Western import into Islam. It is Islam's own gift to the world.

Article VI. On the Hijra to Abyssinia: Our Eternal Debt of Gratitude

Before Medina, before the Covenant, before the Hijra that marks the Muslim calendar — there was Abyssinia. In approximately 615 CE, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), watching his small community of followers being tortured and persecuted by the Quraysh of Mecca, directed them toward the Kingdom of Aksum in East Africa, ruled by the Christian king al-Najashi (the Negus). His words were simple and momentous: "If you were to go to Abyssinia, for the king will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country." The Prophet sent his persecuted community to a Christian king. Not to a Muslim refuge that did not yet exist. To a Christian king.

When the Quraysh sent ambassadors demanding the refugees' extradition, the Negus refused to render judgment without a hearing. He listened to the Muslims' defense. Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, speaking for the community, recited Surah Maryam — the Quran's account of the Virgin Mary and the birth of Jesus, honored in Islam as one of the great prophets of God. The Negus wept. He extended full protection to the Muslim refugees and returned the gifts the Quraysh had brought. This is one of the earliest recorded acts of Muslim-Christian dialogue in history: conducted by a Christian king of Africa, centered on shared reverence for Jesus and Mary, and resulting in the protection of a persecuted Muslim minority.

When the Negus died, the Prophet (peace be upon him) performed the absentee funeral prayer — the only time in recorded history he did so for anyone — and asked his companions: "Seek forgiveness for your brother" (Sahih al-Bukhari 1263, 3877; Sahih Muslim 951). He called the Christian king of Abyssinia his brother. He prayed for his soul. He mourned his death. This is not incidental. This is prophetic theology embodied in prophetic practice.

We declare that the Hijra to Abyssinia creates an eternal obligation of reciprocity for the Muslim community. The Negus saved early Islam when it was most vulnerable. He asked nothing in return. He acted from justice, not calculation. In his example — and in the Prophet's response to it — we find our model: the Muslim community owes a debt of gratitude not only to the Negus but to the principle he embodied: that a just ruler protects the persecuted regardless of their religion, that human solidarity transcends sectarian identity, and that God's mercy works through people of every faith.

Article VII. On Antisemitism: Its Rejection and the Misuse of Sacred Texts

We state plainly and without qualification: antisemitism is a sin. It is incompatible with Islam. It contradicts the Quran's affirmation of the Children of Israel as a people of covenant, the Prophet's own documented relationships with Jewish neighbors and partners, and the constitutional pluralism of the Covenant of Medina. Any Muslim who harbors hatred for Jews as a people, any Muslim institution that propagates anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, and any Muslim political movement that incorporates antisemitism into its program has betrayed the tradition it claims to represent.

We are aware that certain hadith texts have been weaponized to provide Islamic sanction for violence against Jews. Chief among these is the so-called "gharqad tree" hadith, cited in Article 7 of the 1988 Hamas Charter and deployed by extremist preachers across the Muslim world to justify murder. We must speak with theological clarity about this text.

This hadith appears in Sahih Muslim 2922 in the Book of Tribulations (Kitab al-Fitan wa Ashrat al-Sa'ah) — the eschatological section of the collection — not in any section of legal rulings, ethical prescriptions, or normative commands. Its placement within the apocalyptic genre is not accidental. Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj and all classical hadith scholars understood fitan literature as a distinct genre subject to different interpretive rules. Hadith scholars applied significantly lower critical standards to apocalyptic texts than to legal chapters. The text is descriptive of eschatological events, not prescriptive of present-day ethical duty.

Moreover, the historical scholarship on Islamic civilization has established that what we recognize as modern antisemitism — the attribution of cosmic evil to Jews as a people — did not exist in the classical Islamic tradition. What circulates today as Islamic antisemitism first appeared among Muslims in the late nineteenth century, imported under

European colonial influence and dressed in religious garb. Contemporary anti-Jewish hadith interpretation is not a return to Islamic tradition. It is a colonial-era distortion of the tradition.

We therefore solemnly reject the use of any hadith text — eschatological, apocalyptic, or otherwise — to justify, incite, or sanctify violence against Jews or any other people. We call on Muslim educational institutions, mosques, and media to remove antisemitic content from their curricula and platforms. And we call on Muslim scholars to do the scholarly work of contextualizing and critiquing the misuse of our textual tradition with the same rigor and honesty that Jewish and Christian scholars have applied to problematic passages in their own scriptures.

Article VIII. On Terrorism and Violence: An Absolute Rejection

Whoever kills a soul without [just cause] — it is as if he had slain mankind entirely.

— Q 5:32

Islam forbids terrorism. This is not a novel ruling issued under pressure from Western governments. It is the plain teaching of the Quran and the authenticated Sunnah, faithfully understood. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was sent “as a mercy to all the worlds” (Q 21:107). He is not the patron saint of suicide bombers and mass murderers. He is the Mercy of God to creation.

The Amman Message (2004–2005), issued by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and endorsed by over 500 Muslim scholars from 50 countries, established the strongest consensus in contemporary Islam: it forbade takfir (declaring fellow Muslims apostates) without just cause, established the validity of all eight schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and set clear preconditions for the legitimate exercise of religious authority. The Open Letter to al-Baghdadi (2014), signed by 126 Muslim scholars, provided a point-by-point theological refutation of ISIS ideology, condemning 24

specific acts and grounding the refutation in the same Quranic verse with which God sent the Prophet: mercy to all the worlds. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri's 600-page fatwa (2010) declared terrorism to be not merely sinful but kufr — disbelief — under Islamic law.

We endorse all of these declarations without reservation. We add our voices to theirs. We state clearly that attacks on civilians, synagogues, churches, mosques, markets, schools, and places of public gathering — regardless of the alleged political grievance of the perpetrators — are forbidden by Islam, condemned by God, and a disgrace to the ummah. Those who commit such acts in the name of Islam do not represent Islam. They represent its desecration.

We call on Muslim communities, institutions, and leaders everywhere to make this condemnation loud, consistent, and unconditional — not as a response to political pressure but as a matter of Islamic conscience, owed first to God, then to the victims of violence, and then to the billions of Muslims whose reputation is tarnished by those who kill in their faith's name.

Article IX. On Rejecting Muslim Supremacism and Religious Chauvinism

O humanity! We created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another.

— Q 49:13

The Quran declares that the measure of human excellence before God is taqwa — God-consciousness, moral integrity, righteous character — not membership in the Muslim ummah. This is not a liberal gloss applied to a text that says something else. The text is explicit: “Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you” (Q 49:13). Nobility is righteousness. It is not ethnicity, not nationality, and not religious affiliation.

Muslim supremacism — the claim that Muslims are inherently superior human beings, that non-Muslims are fundamentally lesser persons, that the project of Islamic civilization is the domination of all other civilizations — is a heresy. It contradicts the Quranic affirmation of universal human dignity. It contradicts the prophetic example of standing for the Jewish funeral procession. It contradicts the covenantal pluralism of Medina. It contradicts the gratitude owed to the Christian Negus of Abyssinia. And it contradicts the plain meaning of Q 49:13.

The scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl has written with particular clarity about what he calls “Muslim puritans” who imagine that God’s perfection is fully attainable on earth and who claim a self-righteous perfectionism that easily slips into a pretense of supremacy. He insists that any valid Quranic interpretation must accord with general moral imperatives such as mercy, justice, and kindness. We agree. A theology that produces supremacism and hatred has misread its own scripture. We commit to reading ours with the care, humility, and mercy it demands.

We declare that celebrating the richness of other religious traditions, honoring the moral achievements of non-Muslim civilizations, learning from Jewish philosophers and Christian mystics and Hindu sages and Buddhist teachers, and building partnerships of justice with people of all faiths and no faith — all of this is not a betrayal of Islam but an expression of its deepest teaching: that diversity is the divine will, and that knowing one another across difference is among the noblest purposes of human life.

Article X. On the Orphan and the Wayfarer: Today’s Refugees and Immigrants

And they give food in spite of love for it to the poor, the orphan, and the captive.

— Q 76:8

The Quran returns repeatedly and insistently to the figure of the yatim — the orphan — and the ibn al-sabil — the wayfarer, the traveler cut off from

resources and community, the one who is far from home. These figures appear in the Quran not as objects of pity but as moral tests. How we treat the orphan and the wayfarer is, the Quran says, how we treat religion itself: “Do you see the one who denies the faith? It is he who drives away the orphan” (Q 107:1–3).

The concept of *ibn al-sabil* — “the son of the road” — appears in seven Quranic verses and is enshrined in Q 9:60 as one of the eight obligatory categories of *zakat* recipients. Supporting the stranded traveler is not discretionary charity in Islam. It is a binding religious obligation, a pillar of the obligatory almsgiving that sustains Muslim community life. In the classical *fiqh* tradition, *ibn al-sabil* was understood to encompass anyone who finds themselves in need far from their resources and community — including those fleeing persecution, famine, or violence. In our contemporary world, the *yatim* is the child in a refugee camp. The *ibn al-sabil* is the asylum seeker at the border. The captive is the detained migrant. These Quranic categories are not historical relics. They are descriptions of living people who are, right now, testing our faith.

The Islamic tradition developed a rich jurisprudential framework for refugee protection through the institution of *aman* (safe conduct), grounded in Q 9:6: “If any of the polytheists seeks your protection, grant him protection so that he may hear the word of God. Then deliver him to his place of safety.” Classical scholars established that *aman* was irrevocable once granted and that the principle of non-refoulement — not returning someone to a place where they face death — was an Islamic legal requirement centuries before the 1951 Geneva Convention. The right to asylum in Islamic tradition is not a humanitarian concession. It is a religious duty.

We therefore declare that Muslim-majority nations and Muslim-majority communities bear a particular obligation — grounded in Quran, Sunnah, and the living memory of our own history as a refugee people —

to serve as places of welcome, protection, and integration for those fleeing political persecution, religious violence, economic oppression, and environmental catastrophe. This obligation is not contingent on the religion of the refugee, the politics of the host government, or the strain on social services. It is contingent on the fear of God and the love of God's creation.

Article XI. On the Ansar: Muslim Lands as Places of Refuge

Those who, before them, had homes and had adopted the faith, love those who emigrated to them and find not any want in their hearts of what the emigrants were given but give them preference over themselves, even though they are in privation.

— Q 59:9

The Ansar of Medina — the Helpers — provide the most detailed and inspiring Quranic model for what it means to welcome the stranger. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his persecuted companions arrived in Medina as refugees from Mecca, the Ansar did not merely tolerate their presence. They shared their homes, their wealth, and their social standing. The Quran commemorates this with a word that elevates generous hospitality to the highest level of Islamic virtue: *ithar* — selfless preference for others over oneself, even when one is in need.

The Prophet institutionalized this welcome through *mu'akhat* — brotherhood — pairing each Muhajir (immigrant) with an Ansari (helper) in a bond of reciprocal obligation. Sa'd ibn al-Rabi' offered to divide his property in half for his brother 'Abdurrahman ibn 'Awf. When 'Abdurrahman declined, asking only to be shown the marketplace, the Prophet praised both responses: the generosity of the helper and the dignity of the one helped. The model integrates generous hosting with respect for human agency and self-determination — a model far more sophisticated and humane than either indifferent neglect or patronizing charity.

The Quran tells us that one Ansari family extinguished their lamp so that a guest would not see they were going hungry — preferring their guest's comfort to their own (Sahih al-Bukhari). The Prophet declared: "Love for the Ansar is a sign of faith, and hatred for them is a sign of hypocrisy" (Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, multiple narrations). We declare that love for the Ansar today means imitating the Ansar today. It means Muslim-majority nations and Muslim-majority communities organizing themselves to be places of genuine welcome, legal protection, and human flourishing for those who have been driven from their homes.

This includes refugees fleeing war and political persecution, but it also includes those fleeing the violence of poverty and the persecution of economic exclusion. The Quran makes no such distinction. The captive is listed alongside the poor and the orphan. The wayfarer is listed alongside the needy and the enslaved. Our obligation extends to all who are in need and far from safety — regardless of their religion, their politics, or the administrative category the United Nations assigns them.

Article XII. On the Quran as a Guide for Human Flourishing

For each [community] there is a direction toward which it faces. So race toward all that is good.

— Q 2:148

The Quran was revealed as a guide for human flourishing. It was not revealed as a manual for perpetual warfare, a blueprint for religious domination, or a justification for the subjugation of those who believe differently. The Quran's own self-description is instructive: it is *huda* (guidance), *rahma* (mercy), *shifa'* (healing), and *nur* (light). It is described as a message to *al-'alamin* — to all the worlds (Q 21:107), not to a narrow religious elite.

The Quran's major themes — the unity and sovereignty of God, the creation of humanity as God's vicegerent on earth, the requirements of

justice and moral accountability, the warning against exploitation and arrogance, and the promise of divine mercy — constitute a coherent ethical vision for human civilization, not a sectarian rulebook for Muslim domination. Early Muslim exegetes, reading the Quran in its full context, consistently retrieved principles of moderation and pluralism that later, more polemically motivated interpreters obscured.

We affirm that the Quran's call to "race toward all that is good" (Q 2:148) and "compete in doing what is good" (Q 5:48) is a call to humanity as a whole — to Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, secular humanists, and all people of conscience. The race toward goodness is not a zero-sum competition in which one community's moral achievement diminishes another's. It is the shared project of human civilization, in which all communities are invited to bring their gifts, their traditions, their wisdom, and their love of God's creation.

We therefore reject readings of the Quran that weaponize its verses about conflict, taken from specific historical contexts, to justify permanent hostility toward all non-Muslims. We reject the claim that the "verse of the sword" (Q 9:5) abrogates the Quran's hundreds of verses affirming mercy, justice, and coexistence. We embrace the scholarly consensus that contextual, historical, and thematic reading of the Quran produces not a religion of war but a religion of covenantal commitment to the flourishing of all God's creatures.

Article XIII. On the Moral Obligation of Each Generation

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The best among you are those who are most beneficial to others" (al-Tabarani; graded hasan by al-Albani). He said: "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" (Sahih al-Bukhari 13; Sahih Muslim 45) — and the scholars note that in some narrations, the word used is not "brother" in the religious sense but neighbor, encompassing all human beings. He said: "The world is a

green and pleasant pasture, and God has made you stewards (khulafa') of it, and He is watching how you act" (Sahih Muslim 2742).

Stewardship. We are trustees, not owners. We have inherited a world from those who came before us, and we are obligated to hand it forward, improved, to those who come after. This is the meaning of khilafa — the Quranic concept of humanity as God's vicegerent on earth (Q 2:30). It is not a license for domination. It is a responsibility for care. The Quran's great recurring concern with the orphan, the poor, the wayfarer, the slave, and the marginalized is not a concern for charity alone. It is a structural concern: who are the people our society systematically fails? What are we doing about it?

We believe each generation of Muslims is called to ask that question with fresh eyes and to answer it with the full resources of the tradition — its Quran, its Prophetic example, its jurisprudential heritage, its mystical depth, and its capacity for *ijtihad* (independent scholarly reasoning) in response to new challenges. The refugees of our century, the climate disasters of our century, the digital alienation of our century, the resurgence of ethnic nationalism and religious hatred in our century — these are the challenges our generation has been given. The tradition does not give us ready-made answers to all of them. But it gives us the moral framework, the theological resources, and the prophetic example to develop those answers with wisdom, courage, and compassion.

We conclude where we began: with the Name of God, Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim. The God of Islam is not primarily a God of punishment, domination, or Muslim triumphalism. The God of Islam is the God whose mercy encompasses all things (Q 7:156) — whose compassion precedes His judgment, whose love for creation preceded creation itself. To worship that God authentically is to embody that mercy in the world. To care for the orphan and the wayfarer. To honor the dignity of those who believe differently. To stand for Jewish funeral processions. To pray for Christian

kings who sheltered us when we were most vulnerable. To build covenants with our neighbors that protect the weak, bind the community, and make room for every faith to practice its own path.

This is the Islam we inherit. This is the Islam we intend to pass on. This is the Islam through which, God willing, we will leave the world better than we found it.

God is predominant in His affair, but most people do not know.

— Q 12:21

A Chronology of Muslim America

1527	Muṣṭafā Zemmouri (Estevanico), a Moroccan-born Muslim, lands in Florida with the Narváez expedition and crosses the continent over eight years.
1730s	Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (Job ben Solomon), a Senegambian Qur'anic scholar, is enslaved in Maryland and later freed; his portrait is painted in 1733.
1739	The Stono Rebellion in South Carolina leads to a ban on drums, favouring the string and vocal traditions of Sahelian Muslim musicians.
1777	Sultan Sidi Mohammed III opens Moroccan ports to American ships, making Morocco the first state to recognize United States independence.
1786–87	The Moroccan–American Treaty of Friendship is sealed and ratified — the longest unbroken treaty relationship in U.S. history.
1790	Yusuf Ben Ali settles as a free man under the South Carolina Sundry Act, the best-documented Muslim veteran of the Revolution.
1797	The U.S. Senate unanimously ratifies the Treaty of Tripoli, whose Article 11 disclaims any religious basis for enmity with Muslim nations.
1807	Omar ibn Said, a Fula scholar from Futa Toro, is captured and enslaved in the Carolinas.
1819	Charles Willson Peale paints the portrait of Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro) in Georgetown.
c. 1829	Bilali Muhammad composes the Bilali Document, an Arabic manuscript on Mālikī law, on Sapelo Island, Georgia.
1831	Omar ibn Said writes his Arabic autobiography, the only known slave narrative composed in Arabic in the United States.
early 1800s	Enslaved and free Africans gather at Congo Square in New Orleans, seeding the music that becomes jazz and the blues.
1934	The Mother Mosque of America is built in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, among the oldest surviving purpose-built U.S. mosques.
1953	Abdullah Igram successfully campaigns for Islam to be recognized on U.S. military identification.

- 1964** Cassius Clay announces his membership in the Nation of Islam and takes the name Muhammad Ali.
- 1967** Ali refuses induction into the armed forces, citing his faith, and is stripped of his title.
- 1971** In *Clay v. United States*, the Supreme Court reverses Ali's conviction, extending conscientious objection to Islamic belief.
- 1975** Warith Deen Mohammed assumes leadership of the Nation of Islam and turns it toward mainstream Sunni Islam.
- 1992** Warith Deen Mohammed becomes the first Muslim to deliver the opening prayer before the U.S. Senate.
- 1999** Ahmed Zewail of Caltech wins the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for femtochemistry.
- 2006–07** Keith Ellison is elected the first Muslim member of Congress and takes his ceremonial oath on Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an.
- 2014** More than 126 scholars issue an open letter refuting the theology of the so-called Islamic State.
- 2015** Zaytuna College becomes the first accredited Muslim liberal-arts college; Aziz Sancar of UNC wins the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.
- 2016** Mahershala Ali becomes the first Muslim to win an Academy Award for acting; Ibtihaj Muhammad competes at the Olympics in hijab.
- 2017** The Library of Congress acquires the autobiography of Omar ibn Said.
- 2023** Moungi Bawendi of MIT shares the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the synthesis of quantum dots.
- 2026** The United States marks its semiquincentennial — two hundred and fifty years of a shared, and still unfolding, story.

Glossary

adhān — the Islamic call to prayer, whose melismatic vocal style scholars connect to the field holler and the blues.

ḥadīth — a report of the sayings or actions of the Prophet Muhammad; collectively, a principal source of Islamic law and practice.

ḥaram — a sanctuary or inviolable precinct; in the Compact of Medina, the protected status given to the valley of Yathrib.

hijra — the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, marking the start of the Islamic calendar.

mīthāq — a covenant or binding pact; the term used for the kind of reciprocal agreement embodied in the Compact of Medina.

muḍāraba — a profit-sharing partnership in Islamic commercial law, in which one party provides capital and another labour.

qisṭ — equity or fairness in dealing, especially the justice the Qur'an commands even toward adversaries.

ṣadaqa — voluntary charitable giving beyond the obligatory alms; the source of the Gullah word *saraka*.

Ṣaḥīfa — literally a "writing" or document; the name of the Compact of Medina (Ṣaḥīfat al-Madina).

salām — peace; the Arabic root echoed, some historians argue, in the names of the Revolutionary soldiers Peter Salem and Salem Poor.

Sīra — the biographical tradition recounting the life of the Prophet Muhammad, in which the Compact of Medina is preserved.

sunna — the normative example of the Prophet Muhammad, second to the Qur'an as a source of guidance.

ta'aruf — mutual acquaintance or coming-to-know; the Qur'anic purpose (49:13) assigned to human diversity.

tilāwa — the cantillation or recitation of the Qur'an, marked by elongated notes, glissando, and nasality.

umma — the community of believers; in the Compact of Medina, extended to embrace the document's several religious groups as one body politic.

zakāt — the obligatory annual alms of roughly 2.5 percent of accumulated wealth, one of the five pillars of Islam.

A Note on Sources

This book is a work of synthesis, written for the general reader rather than the specialist, and it carries no apparatus of footnotes. What follows is offered in their place: a brief, chapter-by-chapter guide to the scholarship on which the account rests and to which a curious reader may turn for more. Full publication details for each work are given in the Bibliography.

On the enslaved African Muslims (Chapter 1)

The recovery of this history is owed above all to Sylviane Diouf, whose *Servants of Allah* remains the indispensable study of African Muslims enslaved in the Americas; it should be read alongside Allan Austin's documentary collection *African Muslims in Antebellum America* and Michael Gomez's *Black Crescent*. The lives of individual men and women — Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, Omar ibn Said, Abdul-Rahman Ibrahima ibn Sori, Yarrow Mamout — are treated in Terry Alford's *Prince Among Slaves* and across the broader surveys named below. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri's *A History of Islam in America* places these beginnings within the long national story, as does Richard Brent Turner's *Islam in the African-American Experience*.

On Islam and the roots of the blues (Chapter 2)

The musical argument draws on the ethnomusicology of Gerhard Kubik, whose *Africa and the Blues* set the case for West African — and specifically Islamic — retentions in African American song on a rigorous footing, and on the work of Paul Oliver. Laurent Dubois's history of the banjo traces that instrument's African genealogy. These are matters of scholarly debate, and the account here follows the more cautious threads of the evidence rather than its boldest claims.

On Muhammad Ali and religious freedom (Chapter 3)

The narrative of the boxer's legal struggle rests on the Supreme Court's own opinion in *Clay v. United States* (1971) and on Manning Marable's *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, which reconstructs the milieu of the Nation of Islam from which Ali emerged. Edward Curtis's writing on Black Muslim movements supplies the wider institutional context.

On science, knowledge, and the medieval inheritance (Chapters 4 and 6)

For the transmission of science from the Islamic world to Europe, George Saliba's *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* is the essential corrective to older diffusionist accounts; the Arabic origins of the star names, of algebra, and of optics are treated in the standard histories of science it cites. The contemporary chapter draws on the public record of the Nobel Foundation.

On the Medinan covenant and Islamic political thought (Chapter 7)

The text of the Compact of Medina is preserved in the *Sira* of Ibn Ishāq, available in Alfred Guillaume's English translation as *The Life of Muhammad*; Muhammad Ḥamidullāh's *The First Written Constitution in the World* remains the most influential modern study, and supplies the clause structure followed in the documentary reader of this volume. The comparison with American constitutionalism is developed in the author's own *Covenantal Pluralism*.

On the making of an American Islam (Chapters 8–10 and the Epilogue)

The institutional history of the community is surveyed in GhaneaBassiri and in the reference works of Edward Curtis; Patrick Bowen's two-volume *History of Conversion to Islam in the United States* documents its growth in detail. The jurisprudence of Muslim minorities is set out in Taha Jabir al-Alwani's *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities* and interpreted for an American setting by Sherman Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican* and Khaled Abou El Fadl's *The Great Theft*. On the founders' own engagement with Islam, Denise Spellberg's *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an* and Timothy Marr's *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* are indispensable, and Jill Lepore's *These Truths* supplies the national frame.

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